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ABSTRACT

The relationships among demands, coping resources, experienced stress, and well-being were studied in a cross-sectional survey of 210 reentry and 102 traditional women at the University of California, Irvine. The analysis was based on psychosocial stress theory and contextual analysis. Reentry women ranged in age from 26 to 66, with a mean age of 36.2, while tradititional women ranged in age from 18 to 29, with a mean age of 20.9. Several existing measures of stress were used, and two scales were developed to assess the demands respondents experienced across life domains. Additionally, instruments that measured social support, psychosomatic symptomatology, and general well-being were employed. Findings include: reentry women experienced more time constraints than traditional women; reentry women showed significantly less stress in the school domain than did traditional women; there were no significant differences between the two groups on self-reports of overall health, energy, and spirits; and reentry women showed significantly less stress related symptomatology. The findings support use of the contextual orientation to stress theory, which considers both school and nonschool influences. (SW)

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Stress Among Re-entry Women Students: A Contextual Approach[1]

by
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[1] I am grateful to Dan Stokols and William McCarthy for their guidance and assistance in this research.

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Introduction

Among the major trends in higher education in the United States over the last two decades is the significant increase in the enrollment of adult women in colleges and universities. Today, more adult women are pursuing college degrees than ever before. Far from being a temporary phenomenon, this trend is expected to continue into the twenty-first century (Carnegie Commission on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1980).

In response to this trend, researchers, administrators, admissions officers, and counselors are turning their attention to the adjustment of adult women students to the university. Generally, such students are referred to as "re-entry" or returning students because they are re-entering the educational system. In this paper, the re-entry designation applies to undergraduate students over 25 years of age and graduate students over 30 years of age. Undergraduate students who are 25 years old or younger and graduate students who are 30 years old or younger are called "traditional" students.

After gaining admission to college (often a difficult process, but beyond the scope of this paper), re-entry women are usually successful in meeting the demands of college, as evidenced by relatively high grade point averages and low rates of attrition. Other research indicates, however, that the high GPAs of returning women are accompanied by high levels of stress. Much of this research suggests that re-entry women experience a variety of environmental or situational "barriers" that increase the difficulty of adjusting to college or lead to a variety of academic, personal, and social problems (Scott, 1980; Tittle and Denker, 1977).

This literature on re-entry women generally includes shopping lists of barriers to successful re-entry within particular institutions. For example, commonly encountered barriers include a lack of child care, institutional discrimination, inadequate support services, conflicts between family and school responsibilities, and rusty study skills. The barriers approach is useful insofar as it demonstrates that adult women must overcome or cope with a variety of obstacles over an extended time period in order to successfully re-enter and complete college.

Nonetheless, the barriers concept is inadequate as a theoretical model of adjustment among re-entry women. The extent to which barriers are due to individual or environmental factors is often unclear, so that a particular difficulty (e.g., a lack of time for schoolwork) may be attributable to a variety of sources. The goals or outcomes that are blocked by barriers are also unclear. Finally, the barriers concept provides little guidance in efforts to predict the effects of re-entry upon particular students, or to identify subgroups or individuals "at risk" for special difficulties in college.

Existing research does not indicate whether re-entry women encounter more barriers in their efforts to receive a higher education than other groups (e.g., minority students). Some barriers may single out or have disproportionate effects on re-entry women while others may affect a wider range of students. This question is relevant to theoretical issues regarding the manner in which age modifies adjustment to college as well as applied issues regarding program and policy design. However, since little research in this are has included comparison groups of traditional students or other student subgroups, the question remains largely unanswered.

This paper offers a different model of adjustment among re-entry women, based on psychosocial stress theory and contextual analysis. Results of a cross-sectional study designed to test some hypotheses suggested by this model are presented as well.

Psycho-social Stress Theory

Social and psychological theories of stress (Pearlin et al, 1981; Lazarus, 1966) provide an alternative to the barriers concept. Both approaches relate adjustment and well-being to the level of demand experienced by the re-entry woman. However, models of stress differ from the barriers concept in several ways, five of which are discussed below.

First, while the barriers concept emphasizes the effects of external factors upon the individual, the stress concept is transactional, recognizing the "reciprocity of causation" between person and environment (Lazarus and Launier, 1978, p. 295).

Second, where the barriers approach typically considers the effect of a single factor upon the individual, the stress concept considers the inter-relations of multiple factors at both environmental and individual levels of analysis.

A third difference is that the barriers model emphasizes objective factors while the stress model emphasizes subjective factors. The stress model extends the barriers concept by considering not only the actual presence of particular obstacles but also the students' subjective appraisal of the harm or threat to well-being that such factors create.

Fourth, the barriers concept fails to specify the consequences of exposure to barriers. Stress theory, however, includes a consideration of stress effects. Thus, the stress model is more conducive to hypothesis formation and testing regarding the impact of re-entry upon individual well-being than is the barriers concept.

Fifth, the barriers concept fails to consider factors that may explain why similar women under similar conditions show different responses to re-entry. The stress model, on the other hand, includes a wide variety of individual and environmental factors that mediate person-environment relations.

Applied to re-entry women, the stress model suggests that stress is an outcome not only of the barriers encountered by the student but also of the manner in which she appraises such barriers. Various mediating factors modify appraisals and thereby reduce or exacerbate stress and/or stress responses. Severe or prolonged stress may lead to physical or psychological disorders.

The stress paradigm extends the barriers concept by considering subjective as well as objective features and by delineating how the relationship between these factors influences individual well-being.

Nonetheless, the applicability of current stress theories to re-entry women are limited. In general, stress theorists search for stable principles and relationships, and, in so doing, neglect situational factors that influence such relations. For many areas of study, this relatively narrow focus may be sufficient. However, a broader approach is required for the study of re-entry women. This approach is

needed, first, to consider the large number of variables at multiple levels of analysis that have been identified as stressors for re-entry women. Further, the determination of when such factors actually operate as stressors, and whether the individual can harness sufficient resources to effectively cope with the stressors, is best addressed through a broader, contextual analysis.

Contextual Analysis

Re-entry to college may lead to the exacerbation of strains in work, marriage, motherhood, or other roles and settings occupied by the re-entry woman. At the same time, events, conditions and strains associated with non-school domains will significantly influence the nature of the re-entry experience. Therefore, we need to apply a contextual orientation to stress theory.

Life domains represent a unity of physical environment, temporal boundaries, social roles, and individual characteristics that together comprise the major "chunks" of one's life situation at any single point in time (Stokols, 1983; Stokols and Novaco, 1981). At a minimum, re-entry women move between three domains of home, school, and leisure. Since women often assume a variety of roles within the home, this category can be further divided into domestic maintenance, marriage, and mothering. In addition, re-entry students may occupy an employment domain as well.

The importance of looking across domains in the study of re-entry women is based on two assumptions. First, events in one domain may influence events in other domains. More specifically, conditions or events in one domain may preclude, exacerbate, or ameliorate events in other domains (Stokols, 1982). For example, a woman's job opportunities may preclude opportunities for socializing or participating in co-curricular activities, thereby constraining opportunities to obtain social support at school. Stress in her marital relationship may exacerbate stress in school (through the withdrawal of social or functional support or through a loss of energy and attention), but may also ameliorate school-related stress (e.g., by reducing guilt about attending school or increasing motivation to graduate).

A second way in which inter-domain relations influence re-entry experiences is that the spatial distance and temporal contiguity of domains relative to one another may be additional important sources of stress. Much stress may not be associated with specific domains but may result instead from poor integration or fit between domains. For example, stress at school for re-entry women may not be due to the demands within the university environment but rather to the temporal conflicts in which scheduled class times interfere or overlap with other responsibilities. Wide spatial dispersion of domains that require the student to spend considerable amounts of time commuting is another potential source of stress. [1]

[1] This application of contextual analysis is limited to a discussion of inter-domain relations. However, additional concepts derived from the contextual orientation are also highly relevant to the study of re-entry women. These include a focus on positive as well as negative (stress) outcomes and the inclusion of temporal factors as mediators of the stress process. For a more complete discussion of the contextual orientation, see Jacobi (1984) and Stokols (1983).

Figure 1 presents a contextual model of stress that can be applied to the analysis of stress and well-being among re-entry women. Upon re-entry to college, women encounter a variety of demands for change and adaptation, both within and across life domains. For example, re-entry to college produces a variety of demands within the school domain, as well as demands for adaptation in motherhood, marriage, work, recreation, and in the coordination of multiple responsibilities.

At the same time, re-entry produces a variety of opportunities for growth and self enhancement. Not only may the re-entry students acquire academic skills and knowledge, but the addition of school to her life domains may also improve her competence and relationships in other areas, such as at work or with her family.

The individual continually appraises the severity of demands and degree of enhancement provided by re-entry to college. When the individual appraises some set of demands for change as negative, stress results (Coyne and Holroyd, 1982). When the individual appraises these or other demands as positive, self enhancement results. Appraisals of strain versus enhancement reflect evaluations of the severity of demands of adaptation, the adequacy of coping resources, and the desirability of perceived changes (Lazarus and Launier, 1978).

The types of coping resources available to the individual mediate the effects of stress on well-being. The model indicates that, as the number of domains increase, both demands and coping resources increase as well.

The experience of stress motivates the implementation of coping efforts as a means of managing, reducing, or preventing stress reactions. Coping efforts can include cognitive restructuring, behavioral changes, utilization of social support, or environmental modification. Coping is defined in terms of its intent rather than its outcomes, and is limited by the coping resources available to the individual (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978).

When stress is greater than self enhancement, even after coping efforts have been implemented, stress reactions may result, including disturbances in affect, cognition, behavior, and health.

The Present Study

The contextual stress theory provides a model for the analysis of stress and well-being among re-entry women. The relationships among demands, coping resources, experienced stress, and well-being were studied in a cross-sectional survey of re-entry and traditional women at the University of California, Irvine.

A mailed survey administered to re-entry and traditional women students at the University of California, Irvine, focused on (1) objective demands within and across life domains; (2) subjective experiences of stress and demand; (3) coping resources that may influence ability to meet demands and manage stress; and (4) stress reactions, specifically, psychosomatic symptoms and physical health, grade point average, and satisfaction with the university.

The associations among factors indicated by the results provide a preliminary basis for evaluation of the theoretical model. The results also have applied value, by indicating the special vulnerabilities, strengths, and needs of re-entry women.

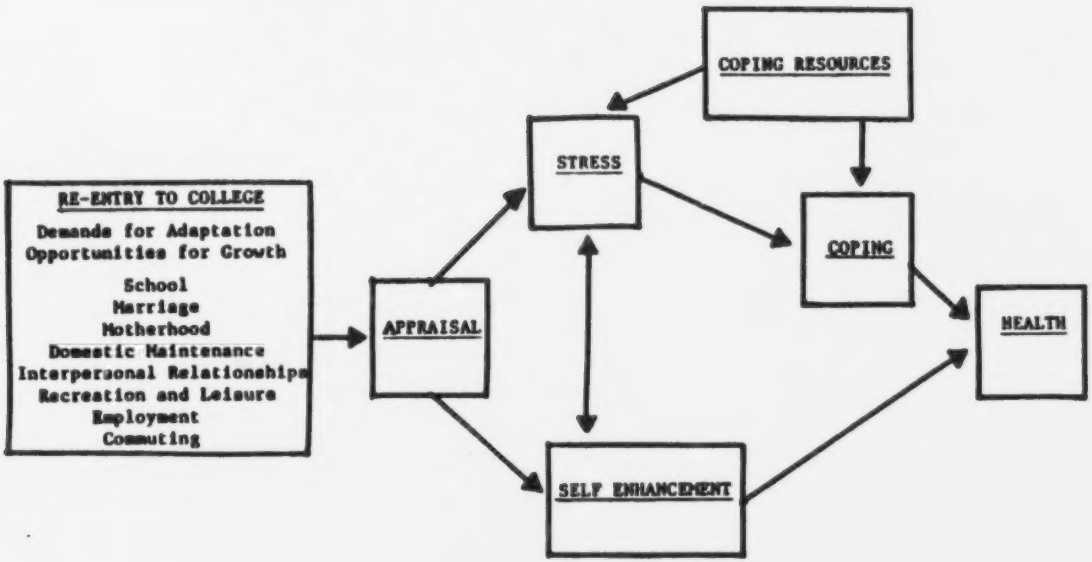

FIGURE 1: A CONTEXTUAL MODEL OF STRESS AMONG RE-ENTRY WOMEN TO COLLEGE

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Thus, although this research does not establish causal links among factors, it offers descriptive and correlational data that provide a strong foundation for subsequent research.

Hypotheses

1. Compared to traditional women students, re-entry women will experience more time constraint across life domains.

2. Compared to traditional women students, re-entry women will experience more role conflict between life domains.

3. Re-entry women will receive less social support for coping with the demands of college than will traditional women students.

4. Re-entry women will rate the school domain as more stressful than will traditional women students.

5. Re-entry women will show higher levels of stress reactions than will traditional women students.

6. Among re-entry students, the relationship between stress in school and health will be qualified by stress in other domains. That is, stress in school and stress in other life domains will be interactively related to health, such that high stress in school and high stress in other domains will be associated with lower levels of health than high stress in school and low stress in other domains.

Methods

Sample

The sample included 400 re-entry women and 200 traditional women enrolled full-time at the University of California, Irvine, randomly selected using a fixed interval selection from a random starting point. Fifty seven of these surveys were returned to the researcher due to inaccurate or outdated addressed. A total of 326 surveys were returned, for a 60 percent response rate. Of these, 14 were discarded for various reasons, so that the results that follow are based on 312 respondents (210 re-entry and 102 traditional women students). This final sample of 312 provides results projectable to the entire population of women students at the University of California, Irvine, within $\pm$ 4 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Among the re-entry women, respondents ranged in age from 26 to 66, with a mean age of 36.2. Respondents in this group were primarily caucasian (83.3 percent). Over half (53.3 percent) worked outside the home. Working women reported an average of 25.86 hours of employment per week. Almost two thirds of the re-entry respondents (61.9 percent) were married and 46.2 percent had children living in their household.

Traditional women by definition show less variance in age. Ages ranged from 18 to 29 years old, with a mean of 20.98 years of age. Respondents in this group were also predominantly caucasian (79.6 percent). Almost half (48.0 percent) were employed, averaging 19.80 hours of work per week. Only 8.8 percent were married, and none were currently raising children in their homes.

Procedure

In April, 1983, respondents were mailed a packet that included a cover letter, survey, and a postage paid return envelope. Ten days later, all respondents who had not yet returned the survey received a follow-up postcard reminding them about the project and requesting their participation. After three weeks, researchers called nonresponders to request their participation. After the survey analysis was completed, respondents were mailed a summary of the research purposes and findings.

Measures

Whenever possible, established measures for reliability and validity data are available were selected for inclusion in the survey. When such measures were unavailable, survey items were developed consistent with standards for questionnaire construction. The following sections describe only those measures relevant to the hypotheses under investigation. Additional measures that were included in the survey for other purposes are not discussed here.

Inter-domain demands. Two scales were developed to assess the demands respondents experienced across life domains. First, an index of time constraint was constructed with nine closed-ended items on which respondents rated the adequacy of available time for various life domains on 7-point scales. Internal reliability for these items is high, with Cronbach's alpha equal to .86. A second set of

questions asked respondents to indicate the extent to which school responsibilities interfere with responsibilities in other domains. Inter-item correlations were assessed by Cronbach's formula, yielding an alpha coefficient of .86.

Stress. Several measures of stress were included in the questionnaire. Scales for the assessment of stress within specific life domains were derived from Pearlin and Schooler's (1978) Problems of Everyday Life Interview Schedule. Respondents were asked to rate stress for each applicable domain, including school, marriage, child-raising, and employment. Each domain was assessed along 5 dimensions (unhappy, tense, worried, frustrated, and bothered). Each item was rated on a 7-point scale. In this way, stress could be measured both within and across life domains. Cronbach's Alpha for these stress scales ranges from .84 for job stress to .94 for marital stress.

Another overall measure of stress was provided by the short form of the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1983). The 4 items comprising this scale ask respondents to rate on 5-point scales their feeling of satisfaction with and control over their lives within the past month. Internal reliability was assessed with Cronbach's formula, which yields an Alpha Coefficient of.83. The Perceived Stress scale shows a significant correlation with the cross-domain score derived from Pearlin's scales ($r = .64$, $p < .001$), suggesting that they measure similar constructs.

Social Support. Social support was assessed with several measures. First, three subscales of the Interpersonal Support Evaluation Checklist (ISEL) were administered (Cohen and McKay, 1984). The "appraisal" subscale measures perceived availability of someone with whom one may discuss problems. The "belonging" subscale assesses the extent to which respondents feel part of a valued group. The "tangible" subscale measures perceived availability of help and assistance when needed (Cohen and Hoberman, 1983). Each subscale includes ten items in a true/false format. Cronbach's formula indicates high internal reliability, with coefficients of .81 for the "appraisal" scale, .78 for the "belonging" scale, and .72 for the "tangible" scale.

Additional items asked respondents to indicate the number of significant others who opposed their decision to attend college and/or their choice of a major.

Health. Psychosomatic symptomatology was assessed by the Strain Measure (Kobasa, 1979), on which respondents rated how frequently within the past month they had experienced 16 different symptoms. Evidence for the validity of this scale is provided by its convergence with reported physical illness (Kobasa, 1979). In addition, pilot testing indicated a correlation coefficient of .86 between this scale and the more widely used, but older, psychosomatic subscale of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (Derogatis et al, 1974). In the current sample, Cronbach's formula yields an Alpha Coefficient of .86 for the Strain Scale, and test-retest reliability at a 4-week interval is .76.

General measures of well-being are adapted from Bellac's Health Status Questionnaire (1971) and include ratings of health and energy relative to other people of the same age.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Re-entry Women will experience more time constraint than traditional women.

Responses to a scale on which respondents indicated the adequacy of the time they have for various activities reveal that re-entry women experience more time constraints than traditional women. A Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) on the 8 items comprising the scale for temporal constraints shows a significant difference between re-entry and traditional women, $F(8,278)=5.00$, $p<.001$ (see Table 1).

Among the items comprising the time constraint scale, correlations between the dependent and canonical variable indicate that the item regarding the adequacy of time to spend "with friends" best discriminates between groups ($r=.26$). The eigenvalue for this MANOVA is .14, indicating that the respondents' status as re-entry or traditional students accounts for nearly 15 percent of the variance in experienced time constraints.

Further, a one-way, fixed effects, between subjects ANOVA with re-entry or traditional status as the independent variable and mean scores on the eight time constraint items as the dependent variable also indicates a significant difference between groups, $F(1,307)=13.18$, $p<.001$. On a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating "not nearly enough time" and 7 indicating "plenty of time," re-entry women show a mean score of 2.81 and traditional women a mean of 3.29.

Hypothesis 2: Re-entry Women will experience more conflicts between school and other life domains (role conflict) than traditional women students.

Responses to 7 items on which respondents rated the extent to which school interferes with other activities and roles show significant differences between re-entry and traditional women in the predicted direction.

Because respondents were asked to skip items in the scale that did not apply to their life situations, results include a large amount of missing data. Therefore, a summary measure of role conflict was constructed, based on mean scores for those items that respondents rated. A one-way, fixed effects, between subjects ANOVA, with re-entry or traditional status as the independent variable and role conflict as the dependent variable shows a significant difference between groups, $F(1,156)=9.84$, $p<.002$. On a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating a very low level of conflict and 7 indicating a very high level of conflict, traditional women show a mean score of 3.90 and re-entry women a mean score of 4.31.

Hypothesis 3: Re-entry women will receive less social support for coping with the demands of college than will traditional women students.

Survey results provide only weak support for this hypothesis. A one-way ANOVA, with re-entry or traditional status as the independent variables and social support scores (on the ISEL) as the dependent variable show no significant differences between re-entry and traditional women.

Other survey items asked respondents to indicate if significant others were opposed to their decision to attend school. Chi square analyses reveal that re-entry

Table 1:
Multiple Analysis of Variance:
Comparison of Re-entry and Traditional Respondents'
Level of Time Constraint

DEPENDENT VARIABLE*	R: DEPENDENT & CANONICAL VARIABLES	MEAN (SD): RE-ENTRY GROUP	MEAN (SD): TRADITIONAL GROUP
Time for myself	.69	2.59 (1.58)	3.40 (1.44)
Time for school	.26	4.00 (1.59)	4.30 (1.49)
Time for leisure	.70	2.21 (1.27)	3.00 (1.48)
Time for friends	.92	2.26 (2.26)	3.23 (1.46)
Time for housekeeping	.41	2.57 (1.58)	3.06 (1.43)
Time for all the things I want to do	.60	1.64 (1.17)	2.27 (1.45)
Too busy to do all I want	-.58	5.70 (1.33)	5.14 (1.28)
More busy now than before	-.53	6.41 (0.96)	6.01 (1.15)

(Multivariate F (8,278) = 5.00; p<.001)

* All items were rated on 7-point scales. For all items except "Too busy to do all I want" and "More busy now than before," lower scores indicate less available time. For the latter two items, lower scores indicate more available time.

women are more likely to report opposition from significant others regarding their decision to attend college, Chi^2 (2)=6.88, $p<.05$. However, both groups reported low rates of opposition, with 8 percent of traditional women and 18 percent of re-entry women replying affirmatively to the question.

Hypothesis 4: Re-entry women will rate the school domain as more stressful than will traditional women students.

The expectation that re-entry women would experience more stress in school than traditional women was not supported. In fact, re-entry women show significantly less stress in the school domain than do traditional women.

MANOVA on the seven items comprising the school stress scale shows a significant difference between re-entry and traditional women, $F(7,292)=6.52$, $p<.001$. Univariate F tests on the items comprising the scale indicate significant differences between groups for all items. Correlations between the dependent and cannonical variables show that ratings of "unhappiness" contribute most to the observed differences ($r=.66$). These results are displayed in Table 2.

The eigenvalue for this MANOVA is .16, indicating that respondents' status as re-entry or traditional students accounts for 16 percent of the variance in experienced stress in school.

Further, a one-way, between groups ANOVA with re-entry or traditional status as the independent variable and mean scores on the seven items as the dependent variable also show significant differences between groups, $F(1,254)=6.84$, $p<.01$. On a 7-point scale, with lower numbers indicating lower levels of stress, re-entry women show a mean score of 3.55 compared to 3.97 for traditional women students.

Consistent with this finding, re-entry women also report more satisfaction with their university than do traditional women. MANOVA on the 7 items measuring satisfaction with the university indicates significant group differences, $F(7,295)=8.18$, $p<.001$. For all items, re-entry women report higher levels of satisfaction than traditional women. Ratings of satisfaction with "how well you are doing in your classes" contributed most to the observed differences, with the correlation between this item and the cannonical variable equal to .91. The differences between traditional and re-entry women account for 19.4 percent of the variance in satisfaction ratings.

Hypothesis 5: Re-entry women will show higher levels of stress reactions than will traditional women students.

The expectation that re-entry women, due to both aging and stress, would show lower levels of health than traditional students was not supported by the data. Re-entry and traditional women show no significant differences on self-reports of overall health, energy and spirits. However, comparison of scores on the symptoms checklist reveal that re-entry women experience significantly fewer symptoms than do traditional women, $F(1,307)=10.01$, $p<.002$. On a 4-point scale, where 1 means the respondent has never experienced a symptom in the past month and 4 means she has often experienced a symptom, re-entry women receive a mean score of 1.90 and traditional women receive a mean score of 2.08.

Table 2:
Multiple Analysis of Variance:
Comparison of Re-entry and Traditional Respondents'
Level of Stress in the School Domain

FEELINGS ABOUT THE SCHOOL DOMAIN*	R: DEPENDENT & CANONICAL VARIABLES	MEAN (SD): RE-ENTRY GROUP	MEAN (SD): TRADITIONAL GROUP
Bothered or upset	.38	2.94 (1.59)	3.45 (1.57)
Unhappy	.66	2.10 (1.40)	2.93 (1.66)
Frustrated	.39	3.37 (1.78)	3.93 (1.66)
Tense	.07	3.95 (1.70)	4.07 (1.40)
Worried	.61	3.53 (1.78)	4.73 (1.50)
Contented	.12	3.85 (1.71)	4.00 (1.50)
Relaxed	.02	5.04 (1.56)	5.04 (1.48)

(Multivariate F (7,292) = 6.52; $p<.001$)

* All items were rated on 7-point scales. Responses were coded so that high scores indicate higher levels of stress while low scores indicate lower levels of stress.

Hypothesis 6: Among re-entry students, the relationship between stress in school and health will be qualified by stress in other domains.

To test this hypothesis, two independent variables were used: stress in the school domain, and stress in non-school domains (i.e., marriage, motherhood, and employment). A third interaction term was created from the product of these factors. The three variables were entered into hierarchical multiple regression equations, using both symptomatology and ratings of health, energy and spirits as dependent variables.

As expected, the total F for this regression equation achieves statistical significance, when symptomatology is used as the dependent measure, $F(3,203) = 31.81$, $p<.001$. Both school stress and non-school stress alone are significantly related to health. These results are displayed in Table 3.

The results of the regression equation indicate that stress in non-school domains adds significantly to stress in the school domain in accounting for self-reports of symptomatology among re-entry women. Comparison of the coefficients of determination when school stress only is entered into the equation and when both school and non-school stress are included shows that the latter produces a significant increase in the percent of variance in symptoms accounted for by the predictor variables, $F\text{change}(1,204) = 23.00$, $p<.01$. However, the interaction term fails to add significantly to the equation's explanatory power.

This pattern is replicated when the general measure of health, energy, and spirits is substituted for mean scores in the Strain Measure.

These results suggest that stress levels in non-school domains do qualify the effect of school stress on health, and that the relationship is best described as additive. The expectation that stress levels in disparate domains would interact such that low stress in one domain might protect respondents from negative effects of high stress in another domain was not supported by these data.

Discussion

Although re-entry women face more demands and conflicts across life domains than do traditional women students, they do not show higher levels of stress or illness. In fact, within the school domain, re-entry women experience significantly less stress than do traditional women. Further, re-entry women show significantly less stress-related symptomatology than do traditional women.

These findings lend support to the contention that stress is an outcome of external demands mediated by appraisal -- that is, that subjective factors are more important than objective factors in determining stress (cf. Coyne and Holroyd, 1983; Stokols, 1983).

Various explanations may be offered for this finding. First, re-entry women relative to traditional women students may appraise the demands they encounter as less severe. Alternatively, re-entry women relative to traditional women may appraise their coping skills as better able to meet demands for adaptation. Their previous life experiences may lead them to believe that they have the capacity to meet the challenges of re-entry. A third explanation for re-entry women's

Table 3:
Hierarchical Multiple Regression:
Stress in School and Non-school Domains With Health

Regression of stress in school and non-school domains on symptomatology on the Strain Measure

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	BETA	R^2	R^2 CHANGE	F CHANGE	DF
School Stress	.49	.242	.242	65.41*	1,205
Non-School Stress	.28	.319	.078	23.00*	1,204
Interaction	.15	.320	.001	0.11	1,203

Regression of stress in school and non-school domains on ratings of health, energy, and spirits

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	BETA	R^2	R^2 CHANGE	F CHANGE	DF
School Stress	-.49	.245	.242	66.22*	1,205
Non-School Stress	-.17	.274	.029	8.26*	1,204
Interaction	-.06	.275	.001	0.08	1,203

*$p<.01$

relatively low stress levels is that they attribute less importance to school than do traditional women. Additional research is needed to determine which of these or other explanations best applies to re-entry women.

Evaluation of the Contextual Perspective

A review of the research findings provides strong support for the utilization of a contextual orientation. The importance of inter-domain relations is indicated by several analyses. First, respondents do experience different levels of stress within different life domains. Second, an additive relation among domains is observed such that high stress in both school and non-school domains is associated with lower levels of health than high stress in the school domain alone. Third, the manner in which disparate domains are linked or integrated has important effects on well-being. Both role conflict and time pressure are associated with increased stress and reduced health.

The results also suggest the importance of considering both objective and subjective factors in the study of stress among re-entry women. Clearly, for these respondents, stress is an outcome of both the actual intensity of demands encountered and the manner in which women perceive these demands.

Directions for Future Research

Continued comparisons of re-entry to traditional women students will indicate the unique elements of the re-entry experience. Future research should continue to explore the special characteristics, experiences, and needs of re-entry women. One important direction of research is replication of the current study in different educational settings. Observed differences will reveal how student and institutional characteristics influence adjustment of re-entry students.

A second direction is longitudinal research that would observe adjustment over time from the initial stages of re-entry to graduation or attrition. Such research may indicate how re-entry women's process of adjustment differs from that of traditional students.

Other, cross-sectional research should compare adult women who drop out of school with those who continue through graduation, in order to determine the factors that promote or block persistence.

Finally, the effectiveness of formal interventions and informal support networks in reducing stress and facilitating adjustment to college among re-entry women should be evaluated. This information can help colleges provide re-entry women with appropriate assistance and support.

The high levels of achievement and low levels of stress shown by re-entry women relative to traditional women in this research should not be used to support a policy of benign neglect of re-entry women. The effectiveness with which these women manage multiple demands is evidence of their potential and determination. Women with fewer coping skills may drop out or never gain admissions to the university. One wonders what more re-entry women might achieve if they were able to reduce inter-domain conflict below current levels. Continued research will help both university administrators and re-entry women minimize inter-domain conflict and maximize the rewards provided by the school domain.

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